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## This Girl's Life - An Autoethnography.

In this essay I would like to consider how the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, 1999 [1990] and 1993) affects trans folk and particularly those of us who are labelled medically as transsexual. (I say 'us' as I am labelled in this way by the NHS.) In so doing I wish to draw attention to how such a matrix may operate to stabilise itself through the use of binary concepts that label and reduce us to one of two binary sex/genders (Schilt and Connell, 2007). Put slightly differently I would like to ask a question: 'Can we think of gender beyond a strict binary?'

I do not ask this question lightly, as a non-binary trans person I am affected by a gender binary that routinely refuses and punishes my gender transgression to result in an unliveable life. I am so caught up in surviving such a life in relation to, as Butler (1999 [1990]: 18) argues, a matrix that is a 'totalizing concept' that I worry that all I will achieve by trying to critique it is a re-invocation of it. In common with many non-binary people I struggle with describing myself in a society and language that presumes that matrix and cis-gender to be the normal state of affairs. Just how does someone like me describe themselves or talk about gender without doing this? I doubt that I have the wisdom to achieve this but hope instead that my provocation may encourage others more able than me to do so.

From the recent attention paid to Chelsea Manning, Caitlyn Jenner and Kellie Maloney through to films and TV programmes such as 'Dallas Buyers Club', 'Tangerine', 'Orange is the New Black', 'Sense8', 'Boy Meets Girl' (the BBC sitcom) and 'Girl Meets Boy' (the cinema film) it would seem that transgender people are in vogue in both the popular media and contemporary society. Attention in academic circles to transsexual issues arguably commenced with Sandy Stone's (1991) 'The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifesto', which led to the creation of the specialist journals 'Transgender Studies Quarterly' and 'International Journal of Transgenderism' plus special issues of others dedicated to transgender issues (Hypatia 24 (3) [2009]; Women's Studies Quarterly 36 (3 and 4) [2008]). Transgender studies is now a recognised part of academia alongside the more well-known areas of feminist, gender and queer studies.

There is growing interest in management and organizational studies of the 'transgender spectrum' (Author 2016; Knights and Thanem, 2011; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Schilt and Connell, 2007; Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Knights, 2012; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015). In this paper I wish to add my voice as a non-binary trans person to these narratives by considering both the terminology and labels used to identify trans people and a major trope that concerns trans lives - that trans people exemplify queerness, or difference, or liminality, or fluidity, or indeed any other 'radical, transgressive' understanding of gender and identity. This trope positions trans people as the transgressive and radical 'other' that queer, and before queer homosexuality, once exemplified in order to both 'challenge sex, gender, and sexuality binaries... [to] institutionalize homosexuality as queer' (Prosser, 1998: 5). Trans people are thus conflated as either queer or, to paraphrase Stryker (2004), queer's evil twin where the former is regarded positively as those that question and play with binary gender to express their sexuality and the latter negatively as those who further instantiate it. I hope to contribute to the growing interest in organization studies concerned with transgender issues by specifically questioning how certain identities are organized, refused and marginalised in a dominant heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990) and by a heteronormative society (Warner, 1993). I also wish to draw attention to the variety of trans identities by specifically delineating some differences between binary and non-binary identities before focusing on a type of non-binary identity - I am not aware of these distinctions having been made in management literature to date. Such delineations are important if we are to understand

how and why the transgender umbrella is comprised of many different, variegated identities and practices. Finally, I hope to do this by presenting a fractured autoethnography of my own life experiences not as catharsis but as an attempt to present an account of an unliveable life. I'll begin by first saying something about autoethnography and this particular essay as it differs in style and form from many more conventional management academic narratives before discussing my life lived as a non-binary trans person.

## 20,000 days on Earth: Autoethnography and writing about myself. (So vain to think this song is about me.)

*Like Nick Cave I have lived nearly 20,000 days on Earth but unlike Nick have with very little to show for it. With no archive to deposit memorabilia I have little but effluvia and memories that cling to me.*

*My mum and sister tell me that they knew I was 'different' as a child. The child psychologist said that my 'difference' harmed my mother and sister: grow up, stop being selfish, think of others and put them first; on the verge of joining my sister at High School I was to abandon my difference. It went unnamed, buried away in a grave so shallow its spectre haunted me for years until 3000 days ago I ceased denying and accepted it as me. This 'difference' that makes me what I am names me 'non binary transsexual': a small label that sutures this girl's life.*

*My difference utterly shamed my father, an army RSM, a veritable 'man's man'. When he drank a beating was never far away but sober his brutality took on a strategic sharpness of a planned and deliberate, condensed rage.*

*...I'm told of a day when I had fewer than 2000 days. My mum had taken us to a local beauty spot - trees, flowers, plants, woodland glades, a river and a small waterfall; sunlight filtered by trees; silence occasionally broken by birds singing, people talking, children laughing; the heat of a Summer's day, the warmth felt even in sylvan shadow. Warm enough for children to splash about in the pool below the waterfall.*

*My father unexpectedly joined us at the pool. My sister told me to remain where I was - my father wasn't to see me wearing her swim suit. So I stayed in the water whilst others returned to their families to eat sandwiches. I remained whilst others packed up and went home as the afternoon turned cool and the water cold. I remained as the light faded and afternoon turned to dusk. I remained until my father left and my mum and sister carried me frozen from the water...*

This brief vignette falls between a 'confessional' and an 'impressionistic tale' (van Maanen, 1988). It is an autoethnography (Atkinson, 1990; Bockner and Ellis, 1990; Bryman and Bell, 2013; Coffey, 1999; Denzin, 1977; Denzin and Lincoln, 2013; Ellis and Bockner, 1996; van Maanen, 1988) that aims to be a 'palpable emotional experience' (Halman Jones, 2005: 116 cited in Bryman and Bell 2013: 475) written in a visceral and often brutal manner in an attempt to convey a 'palpable emotional experience' (Mykhalovskiy, 1997 quoted in Coffey, 1999: 133) of my lived reality where my life is 'unliveable' even whilst lived (with apologies to Scheman [1997]). Some may find it to be an overly emotional account of abjection: I have no answer as I can only relate my life as I have experienced it.

My account, whilst a 'creative non-fiction' (Coffey, 1999: 155), is somewhat more traditionally academic than the autohistoria writings of Gloria Anzaldúa (for instance 1981 and 1987) whose beautiful prose and poetry seamlessly braid reflection and an often implicit academic theory. I lack her skills at writing so instead clumsily resort to clearly interposing theoretical reflection between, and sometimes broken by, italicised biographical vignettes. The whole narrative stutters, fractures,

and the authority of either text is suspended and at times challenged since neither fully explains the other. My reflexivity is revealed as partial and arbitrary and the safety and calm lucidity of academic theory is (perhaps) challenged. The mirror broken provides no academic insight or wisdom, it reveals little but an unliveable life in its broken shards.

My autoethnography, a form of reflexive autobiography where I position myself as the subject of my own research, 'privileges the self-revelatory subject' (Coffey 1999: 118) and offers a different voice to ethnographic field accounts based on interviews and observation. I hope to provide a saturated, flesh and blood account of a 'lived life' drawing on experiences and understandings that may not always be accessible for, or immediately recognisable to, other forms of observational ethnographic research (Contreras, 2014) including the 'carnal sociology' of Loic Wacquant (2004). It permits a political and ethical position from which to respect a desire for privacy that many transgender folk have and so tries to follow the American anthropologist Laud Humphrey's suggestion 'to do no harm' (cited in Goode, 2002: 528): in writing about myself I stand alone and leave vulnerable others in umbra.

Autoethnography requires the researcher to reflect upon their own past experience. The memories that a researcher *chooses* amongst, how they are portrayed, what is let in shadow, is critical to the narrative. Memories, as Sara Ahmed (2006) argues, both help direct our understanding of our past and a future. We preference some memories to stand in sharp relief whilst others fall to one side or are cast off to recede into a distant but never quite forgotten past. The memories preferenced cohere to us; they both help orientate us to a future and are also carried in to it: they gather 'weight' and are always present, always to hand. We both organise our memories and they help organise how we understand our lives in the present and orientate to the future.

Many of my memories are painful to me, as painful now as when first experienced, and now just as then, drive me to tears. I experience no catharsis in reopening these wounds; no closure in writing about and reflecting on an unliveable life, only a pain homogenised by a repetition endured. But I write as an optimist. An optimist because I do not believe that such an impoverished topography is the total of my life.

### [...2,000 and 20,000 days](#)

*I have lived nearly 20,000 days on Earth.*

*Memories circle me like wolves, attempting to corral and herd me towards a horizon that I can only glimpse. At times they recede but there is only a brief respite before their return. Always there when I feel most vulnerable they reveal my vulnerability; they make me vulnerable. I cannot escape my memories, they help make me what I am.*

*A wolf breaks the circle, takes Shylock's price between its jaws and leaves me exsanguinated...*

*...My mum tells me a story of a family day out and my subsequent allergy to penicillin. I don't remember that day. I don't remember paddling in the water wearing one of my sister's bathing costumes. I don't remember my father's unexpected appearance. I don't remember being told to remain hidden to escape a wrath that would surely follow if he saw me. I don't remember the aftermath of being rushed to A&E: the fever, pneumonia, the oxygen tent, the intubation, or the penicillin ... I have been told these things so many times but I don't remember anything of a day that apparently started so well...*

*...I remember what followed a few months later. I remember my sister screaming. I remember my mum running in to the kitchen. I remember realising I had done something wrong even though I was trying to do something right. I thought that my father might stop raging if I was more like my sister. Alone in the kitchen I took a knife and tried to remove what marked my difference from my sister.*

*The knife was not particularly sharp and I was too young to do much damage. 18,000 days later what I regret is that I failed. I do not need a scar to remind me - the memory surfeit. 18,000 days later there is no end to these memories.*

### On being other to oneself – a few words on names and labels.

Who is represented by *which* use of the term and who is excluded?

Judith Butler *Bodies that Matter* p. 227.

*Tranny, homo, lady boy, man woman, la reina, maricón, chupa de polla, zorra, poof, faggot, queer, weirdo, freak, batty boi, daahlin' (misspelling intentional), darling, sweetheart, hinny, Mr, Miss. Lots of words used many times to name me usually but not always by strangers and that sometimes presaged violent physical or sexual assaults. Names disturb me. What's in a name?*

The 26<sup>th</sup> June 2016 paper edition of *The Observer* included an editorial comment on how to write about non-binary transgender folk. It drew on guidance from TransMediaWatch.org to discuss how we are often not merely marginalised but erased by the popular media before it suggested how journalists should label and name us. Transgender people have a problematic history with both the media and academic research (Stryker, 1994; Capuzza, 2014. Hale and Stone [1997] suggests rules for academics who wish to research transgender people). As *The Observer* article suggested the labels attached to trans folk have problematic and contested histories and moreover do not have single agreed definitions. Nonetheless, as I continually refer to myself as a 'non-binary trans person' it seems appropriate to say something about what I mean before discussing the labels' histories and 'dead naming' later.

Binary – refers to a heterosexual matrix based on two, and only two, sex/genders. This matrix consists of 'natural' binaries of man/woman, male/female and masculine/feminine and presumes that man is male and masculine and woman, female and feminine.

Non-binary – a person who does not identify either in part or in total as one of the 'binary' sexes. Some non-binary people may be fluid and move between 'male' and 'female' assignment; some may identify as being both male and female; some may identify themselves as having no gender; and some, including myself, may regard themselves as neither male or female. (This is not a definitive list of non-binary types. For more on trans labels and descriptors see <http://www.glaad.org/reference/transgender>)

Transgender people are those who do not always present as but may accept the sex/gender attributed to them at birth by the medical profession. Transsexual (TS) people are the small fraction of transgender folk who do not however accept that birth assignment and may desire a reassignment to a different gender. TS people are often called transmen and transwomen where the gender suffix denotes the preferred sex/gender and not that assigned at birth. Most TS people are 'binary' since they identify as the binary sex/gender opposite to that assigned to them at birth. The reassignment of sex/gender may involve medical intervention – professionally or self-prescribed – and may range from hormone therapy through to partial or full surgical intervention. Reassignment, often termed

‘transition’, sometimes but not always includes genital reconstructive surgery (GRS)<sup>i</sup>. Many TS people choose to live without, or cannot have GRS, many others remain in transition and so defer GRS indefinitely. It is only a minority of TS people who undergo GRS but ironically academic and popular accounts of ‘transition’ preference the latter narratives (Prosser, 1998).

Note – I prefer to avoid the terms ‘pre-op’ and ‘post-op’ as they do not allow for people who may chose not to, or cannot, transition and also reduces transition to GRS.

Cisgender – A general term used by transgender people to identify people who are happy with and/or do not question their birth assigned sex/gender. It is possible to have a non-conforming sexuality and/or be within the transgender ‘umbrella’ and be cisgender. For example, some drag queens regard themselves as gay men – the focus is on sexuality and not sex/gender. Similarly some transvestites identify as heterosexual males (Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015). The term is viewed by some as trans-discrimination against those people.

Cissexist – A label that argues that contemporary Western society naturalises and preferences a heterosexual binary and discriminates deliberately or not against transgender people.

All of the above are labels by which we come to know, understand, identify and categorise people. As labels they focus on a particular aspect of a person rather than the person as a whole and moreover do so in terms of heterosexual matrix that both normalises and naturalises the cisgender category to become ‘gender’ itself. Transgender is not merely the ‘other’ to cisgender but comes to be what is not normal and natural to ‘gender’ and trans folk are considered different, transgressive, queer when considered through the lens of the heterosexual matrix.

*According to my NHS gender clinic I am a ‘late transitioning, MtF (male to female) TS’. ‘Late transitioning’ refers to my physical age of 52 when I requested a referral 24 months ago to a NHS gender clinic. I don’t like the term ‘late transitioning’ as it regards GRS as definitive of me. This semi-official definition of me places me squarely within the heterosexual matrix as man who will become a woman. But I have always been a non-binary trans even though I have spent many years either denying it or without the vocabulary to name myself: I was never a man and will not become a woman.*

### A Brief History of Some Labels

The words ‘transsexual’ and ‘transgender’ have long histories. Prosser (1998: 9) argued that transsexual was ‘officially invented [in] 1949 when David Caudwell diagnosed as a ‘psychopathic transsexual<sup>ii</sup>’ a female who identified as a man’. Devor (2014) argued that transgender was first attributed to Virginia Prince (Prince, 1978). Prince herself set up and edited the journal *Transvestia* for 111 issues from 1960 to 1986 (Devor, 2014). The academic acknowledgement that some people behave in a gender variant manner however predates Prince and may be traced back at least to Richard von Krafft-Ebing (1893) and Havelock Ellis (1913). To be a transsexual person and/or transgender however was officially regarded as beyond the pale for any years<sup>iii</sup>:

Crossdressing, then known as transvestism, was so unspoken that it did not appear in the International Classification of Diseases (icd) of the World Health Organization, until 1965, nor in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (dsm) of the American Psychiatric Association

until 1968. [Fig. 5, page 8] Transsexualism was so unthinkable as to not appear in the icd until a decade later in 1975, nor in the dsm until 1980. Being trans\* was illegal, insane, and a sin. (Devor 2014:9)

A transsexual person historically was thus equated with a pathological mental illness and male crossdressing was pathologised and regarded as a sexual fetish. These in turn ground some academic and popular receptions of transsexuality that conflate the two so that transsexuality is regarded as a pathologised fetish male behaviour.

Thanem and Wallenberg (2015) not unreasonably argue that a male transvestite should not simply be conflated as someone interested only in a sexual fetish since for many it is an expression of gender identity. Whilst I have sympathy with Thanem and Wallenberg (2015) I am less convinced by their suggestion that the male transvestite is virtually erased due to a disproportionate focus on the 'gender dysphoric' transsexual. Male transvestites were written about and discussed before Magnus Hirschfeld's work in the early 1900s and whilst there are no definitive statistics on the population sizes male transvestites are generally believed to represent between 1-3% of the UK adult population whilst transwomen are considered to be less than 0.03% (Anon, 2011). Much of the management literature concerned with transgender focus on, has been written from, a transvestite or cross-dressing perspective (Brewis et al., 1997; Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Knights, 2012; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015) or where it is not clear whether the empirical study is concerned with male transvestites or transsexual people. I am not aware of any management literature that distinguishes between binary and non-binary TS people or any that specifically focus on non-binary identities.

The term transgender is used by many as an 'umbrella term' that includes many, if not all, Western gender non-conforming identities. Transgender understood as such is attributed to Leslie Feinberg (1992. See also Stryker 1994, Stryker 2006, Whittle 2000 and 2006) and grounds Thanem's (2011: 192) categorisation of transgender people as 'involv[ing] female-to-male (FtM) and male-to-female (MtF) transitioning as well as non-identification with a particular gender or sex, it includes transvestites, transsexuals, drag kings, drag queens, intersexuals, third genderists, genderqueers and agenderists' and is in keeping with other academics (Beemyn and Rankin, 2011; Davidson, 2007; Johnson, 2013; Morgan and Stevens, 2008; and Riggle et al., 2011). Such a categorisation may be problematic however as it potentially conflates non-conforming sexualities with sex/gender (Valentine, 2004) – for example, many (but not all) drag queens identify as gay men and do not question their birth assigned sex/gender. Transsexuality furthermore, as a pathologised medical condition, does not sit comfortably under the transgender 'umbrella'.<sup>iv</sup> Elliott (2009) argued that placing transsexual people under the 'umbrella' enforces a dominance by transgender activists of transsexual people, which takes visibility away from transsexuals and their problems and makes their lives invisible (Elliott 2009; Namaste, 2000 and 2005).

The nomenclature so far preferences both a heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1999 [1990], 1993, 2004) and the common, dominant binary conception where a (binary) transsexual person transitions from one pole to the other. The naturalisation of this matrix views and stigmatises (Goffman, 1963) any other gender identity as in some way a failure to conform to that dominant view – there is no 'outside' or alternative position (Butler, 2004) and as such non-binary identities are invalidated and erased.

*By identifying as non-binary I am officially erased in society<sup>v</sup> and risk the progression of my NHS 'transition' and surgical reassignment. All of my official documents – driving license, passport and so on – identify me as 'female'. In official UK society where one can only be male or female both being a*



*trans person and transition are reduced to binary issues. At the time of writing the UK government continues to refuse to allow transgender folk, and particularly those of us who are non-binary, to self-identify our sex/gender. One is never officially 'between' or outside the heterosexual matrix, one is only ever male or female.*

Halberstam (1998) has critiqued the trope of a transgender spectrum and the linearity of a polarising gender model. The main problems with such a continuum, according to Halberstam, are an inability to understand the potential ubiquity of transsexual identities all along the axis and also that it "make[s] gender dysphoria the exclusive property of transsexual bodies or to surmise that the greater the gender dysphoria, the likelier a transsexual identification" (151).

*I finally have my NHS gender appointment. I've been advised to 'wear something feminine and apply some make-up'. I go dressed in jeans, pale blue t-shirt, DMs, no make-up and I am not 'tucked'<sup>vi</sup>...*

*...'Are you happy with your body? Does any part of it make you unhappy?' I assume the clinic's psychiatrist wants me to talk about dysphoria.*

*'Not really. I've had 53 years getting used to it. I don't particularly like my shoulders, or my nose, or my Adam's Apple though.' She stares at me and I start to worry that I didn't give the right answer. She wants me to talk about genital dysphoria.*

*As a child I tried to auto-castrate myself. I guess that many might regard this as a sign of gender dysphoria but it wasn't – it was a sign of wanting parental acceptance. As an adult I don't hate my penis but aesthetically I would rather just not have one. Bluntly, it gets in the way; if I 'tuck' it becomes increasingly annoying across the day, requiring extra time to sort out when I go to the toilet both before and after or reminds me painfully of its presence if I sit down without thinking. Not wanting a penis does not make me female just as having one does not make me male. But she doesn't 'get that' and despite having told her that I'm non-binary she still lists me as (binary) MtF transsexual.*

Halberstam's point about gender dysphoria again questions the binary and heteronormative narrative of transsexuality whereby the transsexual individual is a male who wants to be female or vice versa and where gender is a spectrum limited by the two normative poles: Male and Female. The trope of a transgender spectrum in turn figures a transsexual person as someone both dysphoric about their genitalia and assigned birth sex and who desires to 'pass' as their preferred binary gender in order to disappear in to a heterosexual society (Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015. Author, 2016 argues that not all transfolk desire to 'pass' in society.). It rather ignores that many TS people do not desire invisibility but acceptance and respect as human beings irrespective of gender presentation. As non-binary I don't regard myself as 'male' or 'female' and my gender is not defined by the presence or absence of my penis. It's just another body part but one that a cisgender society routinely focuses on to organise binary sex/gender.

*Two days after the gender clinic appointment I sit in a city centre public library writing corrections to this essay whilst dressed (untucked) in skinny jeans, a pale pink t-shirt, knee length socks and black Dr Martins 14 eyelet paratrooper boots laced part way with purple bootlaces and finished with pink ribbon – two of my favourite colours and coincidentally those on the 'trans flag'. A young child asks if I am a boy or a girl, a question that I answer with, 'Which do you want me to be? I think I'd rather be a cat!' The child runs off giggling.*

The heterosexual matrix draws attention to the intertwined issues of gender, sex and sexuality. I have so far only addressed gender and sex and will now briefly introduce my sexuality. Gender and



gender identity operate as a basis for sexual attraction (Diamond and Butterworth 2008) and orientation (Tate, 2012) and may help ground the gender discriminatory practices of some (Wood and Eagly, 2009. See Tate and Youssef, 2014 for a discussion about these interconnections). Namaste (2000 and 2005) argues that some ostensibly homophobic hate crime is more a transphobia grounded on a hatred of the victim's non-conforming gender presentation with no foreknowledge of the victim's sexuality and orientation: gender is conflated as sexuality and orientation. This extends to marginalised communities evinced by the antagonism and lateral discrimination of some homonormative gays towards trans people and vice versa in a homophobia evinced by some heterosexual transgender people.

Sexual preferences and orientations are significant parts of a 'lived life' but writing about sexual preferences and sexuality is dangerous in the Academy since many presume that one is what one writes about (Brewis 2005). I am sure that some will question my sexuality and draw their own conclusions based only on my so far stating that I'm a transsexual person but I risk very little in writing of my sexuality: my status as a non-binary person already marks me as 'queer', 'non-conforming', 'deceptive', and 'dangerous' (terms commonly used to describe us). So I'll be blunt – the label that best describes my sexual orientation and preference is 'monogamous, pansexual and passive'. As such one could suggest that I am outside both a sex/gender binary (as a non-binary transsexual) and a hetero/homonormative sexuality binary (I am neither heterosexual, gay or bisexual. See Callis, 2014).

*As a non-binary TS person I guess it's logical for me to be 'pansexual' – how can I say I'm only attracted to men, or women, or both when I don't even identify myself as such? To be honest I don't care how you identify, I only care if you're a nice person and can 'flip my trigger'.*

Pansexual is not the label that the medical profession would prefer I follow – they prefer that I have no interest in sex prior to transition and align with heterosexuality post-transition to subsequently desire a heterosexual male partner (their narrative presumes a dysphoric binary TS person. See van Anders, 2015 for a discussion of the many different identities that concern gender, sexual preference and behaviour that are not adequately captured by the simple presumptions of a normative heterosexual matrix.) The medical profession's preference that I have no 'pre-transition' interest in sex is arguably preferable to some transphobic academics who continue to categorise us as either 'autogynephiliacs', or 'self-loathing gay males', or 'predatory heterosexual males' despite the considerable opposing evidence (see Serano 2010 for a debunking of these arguments).

Sexually I'm 'passive' and I briefly wish to contend, contra Bersani (1987), that my passivity is not a 'self-shattering' that leads to self-loss and re-instantiates a queer masculinity but an affirmation of myself as someone who understands himself (not a spelling mistake) through a sensitivity where I refuse to refuse the stigma (Goffman, 1963) and society's shame of my body (Hammers, 2014 and 2015).

Before concluding this section I would like to underscore that for transsexual people names often hurt. The popular media and some academic accounts often resort to 'dead naming' us by identifying a transsexual person by both a 'pre' and a 'post transition' name simply because to do so is either easier for the writer or because it repeats a traditional 'transition narrative' that places the focus on a particular time and place in a lived life (see Prosser, 1998 for a critique of transition narratives). Dead naming (being called by one's previous 'birth' name) acts as a trigger for many transsexual people since it questions a person's identity and recalls and reinforces a gender history that the individual does not accept. Whilst I accept that dead naming is a very real issue for many trans people – it comes up regularly as a topic in our social media – it is not true to suggest that it

affects us all, all the time, in a homogeneous manner. Real names have more than a personal history as they are also used in the present in specific performative ways and specific contexts. We need to be aware of the nuanced ways in which names are used.

### 3 Names – 2 real and 2 pronouns

#### *Named Once*

*It's a cold, wet Saturday morning in Newcastle. I've arrived at a café to have a meeting with my ex who wants to discuss money. I meet her outside and we go in to join the queue of people ordering coffee or a Danish. As we stand there my ex starts to swear quietly at me, 'You fuck. You fucking fuck. You fuck.' I glance at her and the other people near us in the queue.*

*'Please...'*

*'Don't 'please' me. I want you to know how much you disgust me.' She carries on in an increasingly strident voice. It's now obvious that others can hear her. I squirm, aware that others are watching and all too aware that blood has rushed to my cheeks: red-faced, not from the heat, I know I'm blushing. Fortunately the queue is short and it's soon our turn to order.*

*'I want a latte.' My ex says before adding very loudly, 'Tony or is it Sorsher, or Soresee, or f'ing Circa or whatever stupid f'ing name you call yourself now? Pay her.' And she walks off to find a table. I look at the waitress, both of us embarrassed by what just happened, and fumble my change. It's my bus fare home, all the money I have on me and it still isn't enough for the latte. I want to disappear in to the floor.*

*The waitress looks at the change and I start to stammer out an apology. 'It's ok.' She says.*

*I pick up the latte and go and sit down. My ex continues her tirade and I finally say after what seems like hours but is probably only a couple of minutes, 'Please, if you can't talk civilly to me I'll leave.' She carries on unheeding or uncaring. I try again but she persists. I sigh, get up and try to walk out in a dignified manner whilst all the time really wanting to run. I exit in to the cold, concealing rain and trudge home.*

#### *Named Twice*

*I'm popping. I just knew that I shouldn't have drunk that 2<sup>nd</sup> cup of coffee. I've made it as quickly as possible, up the escalator, through the women's clothes and shoes sections and in to the women's toilets in M&S. The place is full of people waiting for a toilet or washing their hands.*

*My mum follows me in. 'Anthony,' she says in a loud, clear voice 'There's a free toilet over there son.' Women stop, turn and stare, some tut and some glare at others. Where is he? Where's the man who's dared come in here! I hold my head up, try to appear casual, and move as quickly as I can towards the vacant toilet cubicle, thankful that I'm not tucked. Appearing casual is difficult when I want to laugh at the absurdity – women transformed in to meer cats.*

#### *Named Thrice*

*They, my mum and the shop manager, are talking about, but not to, me. My mum, 'My daughter Caitlin? He wears black too much.'*

*The manager, 'She does have her own style.'*

*My mum, 'Yes I suppose he does.'*

*The manager (a little pointedly), 'She looks good. She has confidence in her look.'*

*My mum, 'Yes he does.'*

*Me, 'Ahem, when you've finished talking about me...'*

Three brief vignettes that may reveal how real names, including my 'dead name', and pronouns adhere to me and are used in different ways. My ex is more than capable of using both my dead and chosen names as verbal abuse. My 86 year old mum sometimes uses my dead name without thinking and means no harm even if it does focus attention on me. She sometimes uses my chosen name but falls back on the conventions and grammar of a 2<sup>nd</sup> language learnt 70 years ago and 8000 miles away. Or perhaps her use of a female name with a male pronoun acknowledges me as a non-binary TS person by someone unaware of pronouns like 'hir' and 'xie'? The manager who quite gently tries to correct my mum reflects assumptions based on a binary narrative: I wear women's clothes and have a female name so I must be a woman. One vignette hurts me, one makes me laugh and the third fills me with hope. What's in a name?

### A Trope - Queering the pitch

*All too often transgender phenomena are misapprehended through a lens that privileges sexual orientation and sexual identity as the primary means of differing from heteronormativity. Most disturbingly, "transgender" increasingly functions as the site in which to contain all gender trouble, thereby helping secure both homosexuality and heterosexuality as stable and normative categories of personhood.*

*Stryker Transgender Studies: 214*

*As a non-binary and pansexual person I am completely lost as to whether I'm queer, not queer enough, or just too queer to be queer. Outside the gender binary I don't perform those genders, I'm just me. Outside the binary it's also not about sex-object choice. I guess I must be a very evil twin.*

The quotation from Susan Stryker, taken from a special edition of the journal GLQ, marked both the journal's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and Stryker's own previous contribution to the journal's first issue. Queer, unlike modern definitions of homosexuality, places an emphasis on sex/gender performance rather than sex-object choice (Sedgwick 1990). Transgender folk, queer's evil twin (Stryker, 2004), is all too often subsumed into this general, and sometimes vague 'queer theory' position (Bettcher and Garry, 2009; Namaste, 2000; Prosser, 1998; Rubin, 2003; Stryker, 2004). We are a twin because our non-conforming sex/gender 'performance' is presumed to challenge both hetero, and importantly, homonormativity despite that many trans folk identify as heterosexual. This challenge to homonormativity grounds the antagonism that some in gay communities have towards trans folk. As Halberstam (1998 and 1998b) has shown butch identities help queer the definition of lesbian but a butch may lose acceptance if they subsequently identify as a transman. Perhaps trans is just too queer for some?

(I might add that some trans folk who identify as heterosexual are vituperatively homophobic. This leads transphobes to claim that all trans folk are latent homosexuals in denial; an argument debunked by Julia Serano [2010] many years ago but still often repeated. It is also an argument repeated by some in gay communities who, for instance, tell me that I am a 'confused gay male' and at best a 'drag queen'. Queer but not queer enough.)

We are evil because we are presumed to exemplify, repeat and concretise the sex/gender binary: unlike queer folk we are regarded not as playing with or fluidising gender stereotypes but repeating them. Transphobic accounts clearly regard us as evil – transwomen are ‘male rapists’ who dress merely as ruse to attack (cis)women when their guard is down and they are at their most vulnerable. That we may just be different to the binary heterosexual matrix is lost because we are only seen through its lens as men who are always men and women who can only be women (see for instance Grosz, 1994). For Grosz gender fluidity can only occur within and never between the poles of the binary heterosexual matrix and furthermore there are only ever two discrete gender ontologies. Queer here is about increasing the range of each binary pole but not in challenging or crossing between them. Trans folk here are both not queer and too queer.

Theorists concerned with trans people or gender fluidity often make use of Grosz they are not in themselves transphobic accounts but instead underplay the transphobic nature of her work. Some management accounts are more nuanced and position trans as a fluid, queer identity. My concern is that some management theory presents the ‘transgender phenomena’ not as the ‘evil twin’ of queer theory but rather conflate it as queer narratives emblematic of fluidity and transgression (for instance Brewis et al., 1997; Linstead and Pullen, 2006; and Pullen et al., 2017) rather than variegated ways of how trans people cope and survive in the heterosexual matrix (Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015; Schilt, 2006; Schilt and Connell, 2007).

Pullen and Rhodes (2012), for instance, present an interesting and thought provoking reading of an episode from the TV cartoon series ‘Futurama’ in which they discuss how parody may operate so as to ‘undo gender’ and so allow for a resistance to gender normativity and the heterosexual matrix. I have to confess that I have never seen the programme let alone the episode that they describe but I have little doubt that they do it justice. What concerns me is that they follow Butler and in so doing clearly elide several issues: that trans is queer and moreover reduced to a ‘celebration of gender fluidity’ (Halberstam, 1998b: 290); that trans as queer is transgressive of a naturalised heterosexual binary to which we are held to account; and that to be transgender and a transsexual is to be a copy whereby: ‘[the] meaning of gendered identity is denaturalized and reframed– ‘the parody is of the very notion of an original’ (Butler, 1990: 175) whether it be an original masculinity or original femininity’ (Pullen and Rhodes, 2012: 525).

Pullen and Rhodes (2012) reading of the episode of Futurama considers how we may read gender performativity from the stylised accounts of a robot whom they consider to be ‘male’. It is a particularly interesting example as robots are both sexless and cannot ‘perform’ gender in a Butlerian sense - they are all surface with no psychoanalytic depth. As such I want to consider this in some detail and undertake a hard reading to highlight how it may be read as an extreme allegory of transgender as queer. In adopting Judith Butler, and particularly her early 1990 text ‘Gender Trouble’, Pullen and Rhodes (2012) conflate transgender with queer identities, fluidity and transgressive practices (see Muhr and Sullivan, 2013 for a brief overview of management literature that adopts queer theory and Borgerson and Rehn, 2004 for a critique of the concept of fluidity in relation to gender).<sup>vii</sup> They are not alone in doing so as the idea of transgressive practice appears repeatedly in management literature (Brewis et al 1997; Linstead and Pullen 2006; Muhr and Sullivan, 2013; Schilt and Connell, 2007; Thanem, 2011; Thanem and Knights, 2012).

Pullen and Rhodes (2012) argue that the robot’s ‘male’ performativity is an exaggerated macho account that is ‘undone’ when the robot does ‘drag’. Their considerably more appealing account of a mutant female argues that her undoing of gender here relates to her ability as a cisgender female to reiterate (supposedly) masculine characteristics as naturalised. (A somewhat different reading might however suggest that the cisgender woman performs a range of femininities rather than adopts

masculine ones. A harder reading would question how a cartoon character performs gender at all in the sense that Butler means – the cartoon figure is again all surface.) What seems lost in their account is arguably the substance of their citation of Butler ‘the parody is of the very notion of an *original*’ (Butler, 1990: 175, my emphasis). There is no question of the cisgender female *qua* woman and so her performance is taken to be that of an authentic and real woman – performance here is not figured as parodic. The robot however is presumed to parody and perform exaggerated, overly deliberate and therefore pathetic, male and female identity roles (McKinnon, 2014). The robot, having no sex, is both never in drag and always in drag: it is always a quintessential performativity that has no substance and is unreal. As drag it is a queer performance and syllogistically transgender where ‘drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself’ (Butler, 1999 [1990]: 137). The robot’s drag performativity is a transgressive parody without substance and foundation that “exposes or allegorizes’ the process by which heterosexualized genders form themselves, queer transgender is allegory to heterosexual gender’s (specious, for it only veils its performativity) referentiality or literality’ (Prosser 19, : 31). The man/woman sex/gender binary is naturalised and other possible gender identities are either evaluated in relation to these ‘natural’ binaries or erased. As a non-binary person I am denaturalised and figuratively presumed to have a fake, unreal gender performance: I allegorically become a sexless robot.

Prosser (1998: 28) argues that we cannot presume ‘all transgender is queer is syllogistically subversive.’ Trans identities are not some simple opposition or parodic reaction however that seek to ‘denaturalize’ heteronormativity by transgressive behaviours (Muhr et al., 2015; Thanem and Wallenberg, 2015). As Muhr et al. (2015: 16) argue, ‘in exaggerating the relationship between ‘trans and transgressive’ (Hines, 2010), to what extent is the situatedness of transgression and its multiplicity eclipsed in favour of a singularly abstracted vision of transgender politics?’ Yet even here Muhr et al. (2015) still view transgender as a queer identity. What is perhaps missed in the reliance on a queer performativity is that transsexuals may ‘seek very pointedly to be non-performative, to be constative, quite simply, to *be*.’ (Prosser, 1998: 32 emphasis in original.) The presumption in this trope is that trans is the limit case of the heterosexual matrix (Halberstam, 1998; Prosser, 1998; Stryker, 2004). Other bodies and practices are normative and gender transgression becomes synonymous only with trans identities: ‘Gender deviance [is assigned] only to transsexual bodies and gender normativity to all other bodies’ (Halberstam, 1998: 153). A robot that ‘does’ drag shores up the heterosexual matrix by depicting it as ‘real’ and transgender identities are the parodic representation: it seems that the joke is (always) on us.

*I do not ‘do’, ‘perform’ or ‘work at’ my sex/gender – all these terms suggest that my sex/gender is unnatural, something that I have to achieve, manage and maintain whilst reinforcing that a cisgender person’s gender is both natural and real.*

Why is transgender assumed to be ‘queer’ and a ‘fluid’ gender identity (Linstead and Pullen, 2006), a necessity before a cis-normative person can question their own gender (Muhr and Sullivan, 2013)? Furthermore, why presume a ‘fluid identity’ is preferable for a transgender subject whilst a stable, even if not essentialist, position is suitable for cisgender persons? To quote Borgerson and Rehn (2004: 466) ‘Gender, as fluid, only allows for specific movements between dualist poles, presenting more fixed position at either extreme.’ If we management and organizational theorists interested in gender wish to understand the diversity of trans identities and practices we may need to allow more for difference and perhaps question our a priori assumptions that trans people are representative of queer, fluidity and particularly the cis-gender poles of a heterosexual matrix.

At the start of this essay I asked if we can think of gender beyond a strict binary. I’ve failed utterly to do so in this essay as everything here keeps returning to that binary. Hélène Cixous and Christine

Clément (1986) once invoked Derrida to argue that we are always preceded by language – it is prior to, and defines, us. All I've done, with the exception of two uses of 'hir' and 'xie', is talk about trans folk in the language of, and by relating us to, a cis-normative dominant society. All I have done is continually relate trans folk as the 'other' to cis (or perhaps vice versa) and so rather than escape the heterosexual matrix merely repeated it and so failed utterly to think beyond it. So I would like to suggest then for those interested in gender in organizational and management theory that we may need to do something different than what I've done and rather than question what we mean by gender in terms that merely repeat and re-instantiate gender ask instead if we should use (binary) gender as a category at all. Do we, should we, always write trans as the de-legitimated 'other' to cis and can we think 'gender' without conflating it as cisgender? Following Prosser (1998: 32) can we instead provide constative narratives of trans and cis folk that highlight what it means to 'simply be', and what makes us human rather than focus on categories that separate and make some lives unliveable?

*The UK passport application form requires confirmation that I will not de-transition. The form does not require confirmation that cisgender people will never transition. The same form allows me to identify as male or female and preferences binary gender titles– there is no allowance for any other sex/gender, no allowance for non-binary identities.*

I wish to end by returning to the issues of non-binary identities and memories in order to briefly consider, following Scheman (1997), how one might endure and make an unliveable life liveable.

### **This girl's life – an ending of sorts**

It is easy to present yet another autobiographical vignette that draws on bitter memories since I have many to draw on. In a world where ticking three or more of the ten devastating social consequences of discrimination faced by transgender people (Grant et al., 2011) is considered so catastrophic that there may be no hope of ever attaining a liveable life. I tick 7.

*Seven months follow the submission of the first version of this article and today, a day that is also three days after my 1<sup>st</sup> gender clinic employment. Those last seven months include many instances of verbal abuse, a few of which escalated in to physical and/or sexual assault, including two that required hospital visits. If I reach further back in time there are two instances of rape; the first when 14 presaged other sexual assaults that followed down the years; verbal abuse and physical assaults stretch back for as long as I can remember; so common that the banality seems only punctuated by those that required hospital stays.*

*During the past seven months a friend was beaten senseless in a transphobic attack, another killed herself, a third moved to a different city due to sustained abuse, a fourth - a homeless cisgender woman - was doused in petrol and torched whilst 'rough sleeping'. She died. I submitted that first version shortly before I made myself homeless intentionally to escape escalating domestic abuse from my ex-partner. I subsequently spent 3 months 'rough sleeping' over Christmas followed by 2 months 'sofa surfing'.*

*14 months have now passed since that first submission and I now claim Universal Credit (UC) because my income from a zero hour contract is insufficient to pay my rent and bills. I have nothing saved towards my medical transition or for emergencies; what little I had saved was quickly spent during the 10 weeks between claiming UC and finally being awarded the first payment. 10 weeks between December and February with insufficient money for rent, food and bills. With UC I now have a little over £7 a week left to live on after I have paid my fixed costs: electricity, water, council tax, credit*

*card debt, rent arrears, overpayment of Job Seekers Allowance, etc. I dare not turn the heating on and have unplugged the fridge to reduce my electricity bill. My GP tells me that at 178 cm in height and 48 kilos I am malnourished. She provides me with tokens so that once a fortnight I may visit a local food bank to supplement my food shopping. Once a fortnight I walk to her surgery and the following day walk to the foodbank. I walk in to town every day to use the internet at the public library both to write essays like this and to fulfil my UC commitment to search for work. I walk the equivalent of 3 marathons each month come rain, come shine because I cannot afford public transport. I walk despite the gnawing pain in my stomach and the ache in my leg. This is an unliveable life so how to make it liveable?*

It would be easy – and would make for a more coherent narrative – to only focus on my vulnerability as a non-binary person and feed the wolves that appear when I am vulnerable. That however is not the sum total of my life. A narrative that focuses only on discrimination and the instances of major- and micro-aggressions that derive from my ‘difference’ would fail to account for the many positive things that occur. It would ignore the support I have from my mum, sister, daughter and some close friends. It would ignore the very many daily instances where discrimination does not occur and where strangers are supportive of me or at least just plain indifferent and so see me as a person rather than as a ‘transgender freak’. It would flatten all under the weight of a homogenised narrative of unending abuse, an unliveable life not liveable, which can only have one conclusion and which the wolves of memory would try to drive me towards. I write as an optimist however because of the many instances of support and the kindness of strangers that I also experience.

Here are just a few:

*...‘Raspberries. I’ve saved these raspberries for you.’ The woman in the foodbank hands me a box, ‘You said last time how much you like and miss them.’ ...*

*...I’d saved my pennies for two months to buy Samuel R. Delaney’s Times Square Red, Times Square Blue. ‘£20. Here I’ll stamp your free book card a few more times. It’s now complete so you can have £10 off.’*

*‘I read strange things.’*

*He looks at me and says, ‘No. I did Gender Studies at University. You read really interesting books.’...*

*...‘You remind me of Patti Smith. She’s beautiful because she’s different. You’re different too.’ And with that he walked away. I have no idea who he was but he brightened up my day...*

*...The previous tenant asks me, ‘Would you like a TV? For free. I don’t want anything for it... I’ve got a new one.’ I decline and tell him I prefer listening to the radio...*

The four brief examples above are taken from thousands of small, routine occurrences in my life and make me optimistic because they reveal that any life can be made liveable. Towards the close of *City Boy* Edmund White (2009) turns to Foucault to write that his experiences as a gay man in New York had greater freedom before gay identities were organised by being named, codified and normalised. Weeks after the horrific mass shooting in Orlando the world may not seem to be a particularly tolerant place: marginalised identities may well be more marginalised, made less free than White experienced and many more lives made unliveable. My fractured narrative has no conclusion since what little coheres is rendered effluvium, too slight to form a coda let alone draw conclusions. A lack of a conclusion transgresses a desire for narrative closure where loose ends are tied up neatly, the butler revealed as murderer, and where we close the book with a sense of finality even whilst looking forward to its continuation in volume 2. There is no such conclusion as I have no neat and



tidy answers to my life, only memories - some of which turn to ash in my mouth no matter how much I drink of them. But this essay, poor as it is, is an attempt at an academic account and requires an ending. So rather than conclude my narrative the ending that I give asks us all an open question – how may we organise to make lives liveable rather than foreclose them?

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<sup>i</sup> There are different types of GRS. GRS may be partial, for example where only the testes are removed, or full surgery where all the genitalia are removed, or reshaped, or altered. SRS may result in a cosmetic, part cosmetic, or full 'functional' reassignment. GRS, of any type, is a long, invasive and relatively high risk operation.

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<sup>ii</sup> Spelling in the original. It is worth noting that for some within or allied to transgender communities the use of the term transexual (one 's') may avoid the pathologising term 'transsexual' (Halberstam 1998). Notwithstanding this valid concern I have continued to use the term transsexual (double 's') as that is the convention used most commonly in the popular and academic literatures.

<sup>iii</sup> The 1968 Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association lists and defines transvestitism as a sexual deviation.

<sup>iv</sup> See Footnote 2 in Stryker (1994) for more on this.

<sup>v</sup> 2015 UK Ministry of Justice response to a petition to the UK parliament to recognise non-binary identities.

<sup>vi</sup> Tucking - a procedure where the testicles are pushed into a pelvic cavity and the penis is strapped or tapped down and pointed towards the spine – is often done to avoid an obvious bulge in a dress or pants.

<sup>vii</sup> I am not suggesting that Judith Butler is a queer theorist. My concern is how her work has often been taken up and used within queer theory in relation to transgender narratives.